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1 - Six technologies top committee's M6 disposal list, Shreveport Times, 3/11/2015

<http://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/news/local/2015/03/11/six-technologies-top-committees-disposal-list/70171908/>

The citizens who make up a large part of the Minden Dialogue Committee ended their final working session more confident than ever their list of six recommended technologies will be preferred over an open burn — even though the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency stopped just short of taking it out of consideration.

2 - Ecological and economic impact of Houston Ship Channel collision, Fox 26 Houston, 3/10/2015

<http://apps.texastribune.org/undrinkable/rio-bravo-el-cenizo/>

The Rio Bravo Water Treatment Plant opened in 2006 as a state-of-the-art technological wonder, designed to distill 2.4 million gallons of water per day — clean, safe, drinkable water. But nearly a decade later, the 8,000 residents of Rio Bravo and neighboring El Cenizo mostly still buy their drinking and cooking water from brightly colored kiosks around town.

3 – Why Fort Smith, Arkansas Is Planning Oklahoma's Next Lake, NPR StateImpact, 3/12/2015

<http://stateimpact.npr.org/oklahoma/2015/03/12/why-fort-smith-arkansas-is-planning-oklahomas-next-lake/>

In Oklahoma, the natural beauty of Lee Creek — one of the state's scenic rivers — is protected by state law. In Arkansas, Lee Creek is an important water source for fast-growing Fort Smith. Now, Fort Smith has a plan to turn Lee Creek into Oklahoma's next lake, and reignite a dispute that was settled more than 20 years ago.

4 – SF climate task force urges opposing PNM rate hike, Albuquerque Journal, 3/12/2015

<http://www.abqjournal.com/553935/north/sf-climate-task-force-urges-opposing-pnm-rate-hike.html>

The Climate Action Task Force formed by Mayor Javier Gonzales last year to identify what the city can do to prepare for climate change is recommending that the city work to oppose the Public Service Company of New Mexico's proposed rate increase.

5 – Proposed OG&E hike draws critics of utility's plan, EPA mandate, Tulsa World, 3/12/2015

http://www.tulsaworld.com/business/energy/proposed-og-e-hike-draws-critics-of-utility-s-plan/article_08182429-2c39-599a-be04-4687f6d2cd94.html

Representatives of low-income Oklahomans and a large industrial customer were among critics Tuesday of an Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co. plan to recover \$1.1 billion from customers for environmental compliance and replacement generation.

6 - Central Texas Air Coalition approves EPA letter, but not before criticism from Austin Council Member, Austin-American Statesman, 3/11/2015

<http://environment.blog.statesman.com/2015/03/11/central-texas-air-coalition-approves-epa-letter-but-not-before-criticism-from-austin-council-member/>

A regional air quality coalition approved a letter on Wednesday to ask the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for some mercy in its air quality decisions, but not before a conservative-minded Austin City Council member encouraged the coalition to go on the attack.

7 - Los Alamos May Face Stricter Runoff Regulations, KUNM, 3/11/2015

<http://kunm.org/post/los-alamos-may-face-stricter-runoff-regulations>



9636321

Should Los Alamos National Labs and Los Alamos County be held to the Clean Water Act standards for stormwater runoff that ends up in the Rio Grande? That's the question the Environmental Protection Agency is weighing. A public comment period on the matter will begin soon.

8 - Salvage plans underway for damaged tanker in Houston Ship Channel, KPRC, 3/11/2015

<http://www.click2houston.com/news/salvage-plans-underway-for-damaged-tanker-in-houston-ship-channel/31738114#>

Plans to salvage the damaged chemical tanker Carla Maersk got underway Wednesday, two days after a collision with another ship in the Houston Ship Channel.

9 - DSHS on ship collision: Don't eat seafood with a chemical odor, KPRC, 3/11/2015

<http://www.click2houston.com/news/dshs-on-ship-collision-dont-eat-seafood-with-a-chemical-odor/31739378>

Installing a new wood floor is usually about aesthetics: brown or black? Glossy or matte? Now, some Americans and businesses are grappling with another feature: formaldehyde.

10 - \$15.9 million in starter switches: Big parts create big cost for pump stations, New Orleans Times-Picayune, 3/11/2015

http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2015/03/new-orleans-canal-pump-station.html#incart_river

The permanent closure and pump station structures being built at the mouths of the 17th Street, Orleans Avenue and London Avenue canals will cost an additional \$15.9 million because of a change in the complicated electrical switches used to start the pumps, the Army Corps of Engineers announced this week.

11 - McConnell, Inhofe, GOP aim to undermine clean power without an alternative solution to climate change (opinion), Tulsa World, 3/11/2015

http://www.tulsaworld.com/opinion/othervoices/national-resources-defense-council-press-secretary-mcconnell-inhofe-gop-aim/article_7bc87502-1e14-51d8-bcb9-86f8974474d3.html

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman James Inhofe (R-OK) held up a misleading chart Wednesday to assert that a number of states oppose the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan.

12 - EPA chief calls for 'binding' global agreement, Greenwire, 3/11/2015

<http://www.eenews.net/greenwire/stories/1060014766/feed>

The international community must reach a legally binding agreement on climate change this year, U.S. EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy said today.

13 - At long last, New Orleans has a map of its construction projects. But could it be more?, New Orleans Times-Picayune, 3/11/2015

<http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2015/03/at-long-last-new-orleans-has-a.html>

While New Orleans' moving labyrinth of street closures, blinking arrows, orange barrels and chain-link fences continues to consternate denizens and drivers alike, the city now has an online roadmap to all those obstacles.

14 - City of Claremore obtains \$21 million in financing to expand water treatment plant, Claremore (OK) World, 3/12/2015

http://www.tulsaworld.com/communities/claremore/news/city-of-claremore-obtains-million-in-financing-to-expand-water/article_75f5e1b6-165b-5c14-800f-54b2d0e47748.html

The city has secured financing for \$21 million in upgrades to a municipal water treatment plant. The city council and Claremore Public Works Authority recently approved an agreement to borrow that amount from RCB Bank at a 2.59 percent interest rate over 15 years, City Manager Jim Thomas said.

Six technologies top committee's M6 disposal list

Vickie Welborn, 5:22 p.m. CDT March 11, 2015



(Photo: Vickie Welborn/The Times)

MINDEN — They left the meeting with open tray burning of M6 propellant still on the table. But it was No. 20 on a list of 20.

And the citizens who make up a large part of the Minden Dialogue Committee ended their final working session more confident than ever their list of six recommended technologies will be preferred over an open burn — even though the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency stopped just short of taking it out of consideration.

EPA Region 6 Director Ron Curry affirmed State Rep. Gene Reynolds' statement the open burn cannot be totally eliminated because it would complicate the transition from the proposals already submitted on that disposals process. It's also being considered in a contingency plan should another explosive emergency occur at Camp Minden.

But to Frances Kelly, of Louisiana Progress Action, Curry assured, "I hear you," and adding a few minutes later, "We're looking at the alternatives that have been presented today."

Kelley told Curry at the conclusion of an almost six-hour committee meeting Wednesday she needed assurances or something writing from the decision-makers. In lieu of that, the two dozen committee members present agreed to add "open burning is not an option" to its list of 14 attributes used to evaluate alternative disposal methods for the more than 15 million pounds of increasingly unstable M6 propellant stored in Igloos across the Camp Minden property.



[SHREVEPORTTIMES.COM](http://shreveporttimes.com)

Hundreds chant 'Stop the Burn' at M6 rally

(<http://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/news/local/2015/03/03/hundreds-chant-stop-burn-rally/24354535/?from=global&sessionKey=&autoLogin=>)

The committee, which has been meeting for more than a month, narrowed 20 different technologies to the top six: super critical water oxidation (SCWO), microwave reactor, rotary kiln, humic acid catalyzed hydrolysis-neutralization, tunnel furnace and contained burn indoors.

No single one was outed as the best by the group, even though individual members spoke about their personal pros and cons. A lot of discussion centered on SCWO, a technology Kelley said was invented because another community similar to Minden didn't want to risk chemical agents in their environment.

"It's the technology I support, I'm going to be honest about that," she said.

Brian Salvatore, a LSUS chemistry professor, said in terms of destruction efficiency and what it will do to the air, "It can't be beat." Slawomir Lomnicki, of the LSU Superfund Division in Baton Rouge, generally agreed with Kelley, but said there are limitations. "It's not as rosy as everyone wants it to be."

Likewise, Karen Price of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality said SCWO has not been proven with M6 and there are concerns with its effluent testing.

A SCWO unit formerly was based at Camp Minden but was moved Oklahoma, where it is in storage. Use of it by its maker, General Atomics, depends upon a request from the U.S. Army. At the meeting's conclusion, Army spokeswoman Kristina Curley said it would be made available if needed.

Evaluation of the six technologies was based on a number of factors, or attributes, including lowest possible emissions, limited waste creation, safety, stability and the time element.

Committee members took turns reviewing the other disposal methods and the group added pluses and challenges. By mid-afternoon, they had completed their list, which will be fine-tuned in the next two days in preparation for submission to the EPA on Friday.

The EPA staff will analyze the information and from that create an action memo to correspond to the agreement signed in October that initially specified open burn as the only disposal process.

Curry anticipates the memo, which he referred to as performance-based, will be produced by March 17, since 5 p.m. March 18 is the date for the Louisiana Military Department accept any new competitive quotes that will be added to the proposals submitted in January.

Col. Ron Stuckey, Camp Minden installation commander, said what the military department does next depends upon the EPA's action memo. He could offer no time when the bids will be opened; however, he said when it's done it could take a week or two to complete a comprehensive review. Stuckey also said he's trying to get members of the dialogue committee involved in that process, too.


Only after all of that is done will a vendor be selected. Even then, the EPA has the right to accept or reject the company's work plan. Curry said it could be May before that point is reached, but he assured the group they will be kept informed, as will the public.

Doyline resident Rebecca Shelley made an impassioned plea to Curry, telling him citizens of the area would not rest until they hear for certain there will be no open burn.


"Whoever you need to take that back to, whoever the Army needs to take that back to," she said, also expressing appreciation for their work so far. "This community has sat on pins and needles for two and a half years. Somebody can say that's off the table. For what we've been put through from the beginning. ... I would hope with all sincerity the agency I expected to protect me and my children and my grandchildren and future generations can get this off of here."


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That's the private road bridge at Bayou Dorcheat boat launch. Can you say the water is high? pic.twitter.com/nqO1nkoQ3O



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UPDATE: Arrest made in Mansfield man's homicide. Gary Lewis Walker, 33, is charged with 2nd-degree murder. bit.ly/1AIRmKS

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UNDRINKABLE

On the banks of the Rio Grande, an expensive plan for clean water crashes amid ineptitude and alleged fraud

By **Neena Satija** & **Alexa Ura** | March 8, 2015



Bertha Torres looks at records that her daughter, Karla, has saved in their home in El Cenizo. Most of the records are from state regulators who dealt with drinking water quality problems in the community. Photo by Jennifer Whitney.

SHARELINES



In Rio Bravo and El Cenizo, residents' trust of the tap water is suspended in a tainted solution

RIO BRAVO — It cost \$12 million, and was expected to change the lives of hundreds of poor, mostly Hispanic families living in two hard-luck border towns.

The Rio Bravo Water Treatment Plant opened in 2006 as a state-of-the-art technological wonder, designed to distill 2.4 million gallons of water per day — clean, safe, drinkable water.

But nearly a decade later, the 8,000 residents of Rio Bravo and neighboring El Cenizo mostly still buy their drinking and cooking water from brightly colored kiosks around town. Elderly patrons at the senior care center run by Rio Bravo's mayor drink bottled water and use the caps as lotería markers.

"Who here would be willing to drink some tap water?" Dr. Francisco Peña asked the folks at the care center last fall, before he was elected mayor. "Who is willing to drink water that comes from your public water treatment plant?" From a crowd of 30 people, there was silence.



Francisco Peña, the mayor of Rio Bravo, asks the residents of an adult day care center he runs if they feel comfortable drinking tap water. In a room of 30, he's met with silence. Photo by Jennifer Whitney.

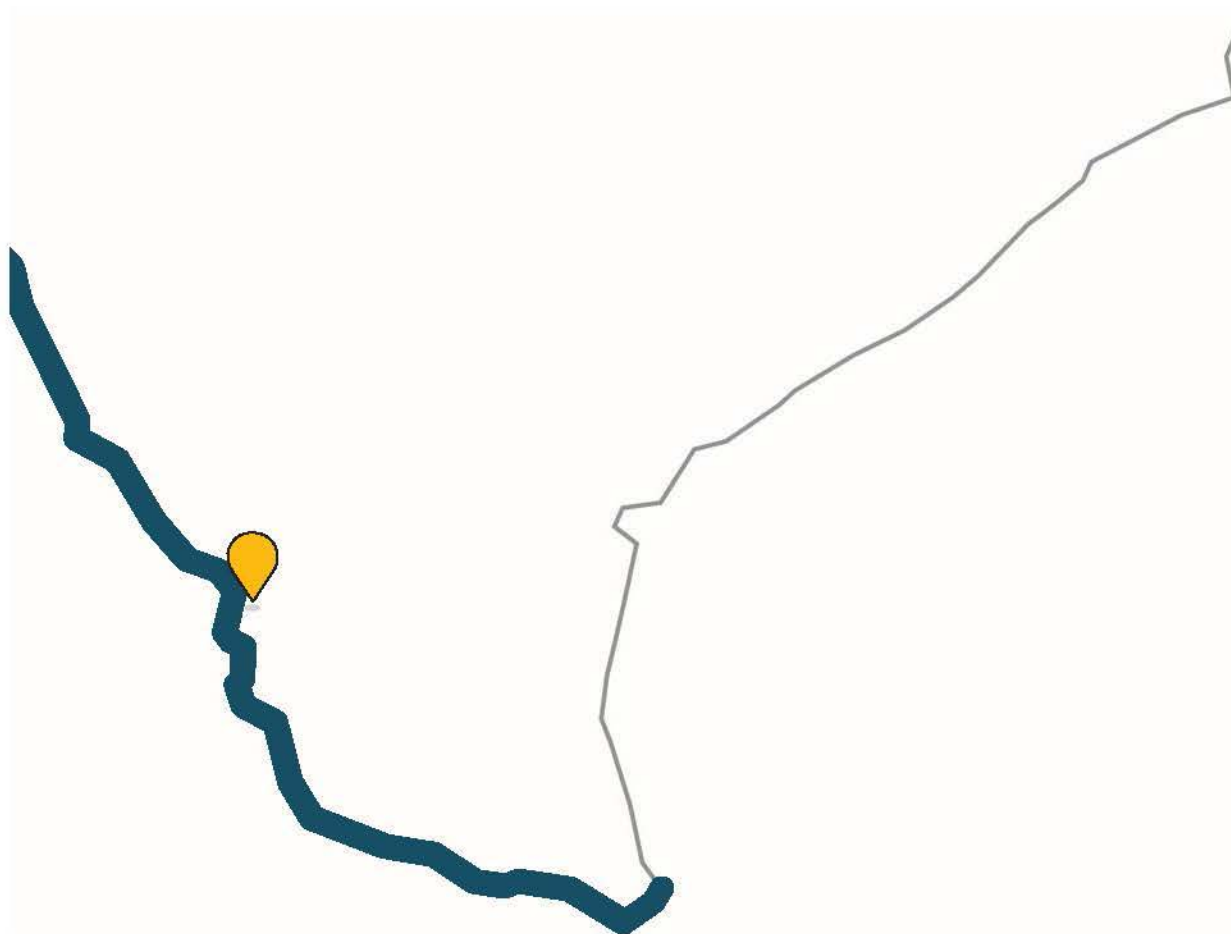
The Rio Bravo plant has been fraught with problems since it opened. The sophisticated system often doesn't work, or operators don't know how to work it. State inspectors have repeatedly cited the plant for pumping foul water out to its customers. Eight current and former employees

have been indicted for falsifying water quality records sent to the state.

And the locals still cannot trust what comes out of their faucets.

“We had to start using filtered water because we didn’t want to lose clients,” says Fausta Montoya, an employee at the Los Pasteles Bakery in Rio Bravo, which spends more than \$150 a month on bottled water at Family Dollar.

Huddled on the banks of the Rio Grande about 20 miles south of Laredo, Rio Bravo and El Cenizo are former **colonias** — makeshift communities that sprouted up when greedy developers sold cheap land to poor families desperate for affordable housing.



Rio Bravo/El Cenizo

● Rio Grande



Notorious developer Cecil McDonald charged as little as \$50 down for property in the 1980s.

When his real estate investment firm went bankrupt, the two colonias were left to figure out how to get basic services.

A series of **bankruptcy settlements**, state **criminal** action and citizen lawsuits helped get the job done. But water was particularly tricky because the shoddy treatment plant McDonald built couldn't even provide enough water for fire hydrants.

Things were supposed to change in 2006.

TROUBLE FROM THE START

"Was it ever built correctly? We don't know," says Luis Perez-Garcia, the Webb county engineer who took charge of the troubled plant in the spring of 2013.

With help from the state, Webb County set out to build a top-flight plant, the first in Texas to disinfect water — pulled from one of the Rio Grande's most **polluted stretches** — by pouring it over fluorescent, ultraviolet lamps. An automated computer system was supposed to sample water and ensure quality.

Perez-Garcia believes the problems came not from the plant's design but from an inexperienced construction company trying to cut costs. Many of those who worked on the project — engineers for Webb County, who oversaw it, and staff at the Texas Water Development Board, who helped fund it — left soon after it was finished, taking knowledge of its systems with them.



It is unusual for Texas counties to operate water treatment plants, and Webb County has not mustered the political will and financial resources to run its facilities properly, critics say.

From the beginning, residents grumbled about smelly, strangely colored water. They increasingly complained about gastrointestinal issues and skin rashes, advocates say.

Complaints eventually reached the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). But the state's pollution enforcement agency had long been aware of the problems.

Just months after the plant's 2006 ribbon-cutting, agency investigator Elsa Hull visited and reported that the automated computer system wasn't working. The water's turbidity — a key indicator of whether it is drinkable — wasn't being measured properly.

A year later, Hull noticed something strange about the way workers at the plant were filling out monthly water quality reports they were required to submit to the TCEQ. At times, the data Webb County sent to the state was different from what Hull saw the operators write in their daily logs.



Water enters another phase of treatment inside the Rio Bravo treatment plant, which was finished in 2006 with \$12 million in state funds. Photo by Jennifer Whitney.

Officials now believe what Hull saw was no accident. In October, the Webb County district attorney's office indicted eight current and former plant employees for allegedly falsifying the records, including Johnny Amaya, the former water utilities director and a longtime Laredo politician.

Amaya has pleaded not guilty, and a trial is expected no earlier than March, says his attorney, Fausto Sosa.

"Instead of trying to fix what was wrong with the plant, they were just reporting rosy numbers," says Perez-García, who took over as engineer in mid-2013.

In the first seven years of the plant's operation, Webb County was cited more than 20 times by

the TCEQ for failing to operate the facility properly and submitting bogus water quality reports to the state. Webb County paid several thousand dollars in fines, and most violations were eventually “resolved,” state records show.

But after receiving more than a dozen complaints about the water in just two days in the summer of 2013, Hull returned and found conditions worse than she had thought. Many key pieces of equipment were not working. Her tests of the water’s turbidity showed it was three times higher than the level at which the TCEQ requires customers to boil water before using it. Turbidity levels were shown to be high the month before, too, meaning Webb County should have issued a “boil water notice” even earlier, Hull wrote to her bosses.

Water produced by the plant also tested positive for E. coli bacteria. Even a mouthful of water contaminated with it can cause severe or bloody diarrhea. Infections from E. coli can also cause kidney damage.

“Instead of trying to fix what was wrong with the plant, they were just reporting rosy numbers.”

— Luis Perez-Garcia, Webb county engineer

Webb County was ordered to post notices urging residents of El Cenizo and Rio Bravo to boil their water. Hull sent a scathing email to Perez-Garcia. “Why did the county not issue a Boil Water Notice earlier?” she said. “Who decided to forego a BWN and not protect the customers? This cannot be excused by inexperience or the incompetence of untrained staff.”

The Laredo Health Department, which at the time provided some public health services to the area, was forced to haul in truckloads of water and go door to door teaching residents how to properly boil the tap water to avoid exposure to harmful bacteria and gastrointestinal diseases. (The department recently ended its contract with the county.)

The state health department was not involved. While it is responsible for providing services to Rio Bravo and El Cenizo, which don’t have their own health departments, a spokesman for the Texas Department of State Health Services says its office of border health has “no authority or expertise in drinking water.”

“Drinking water issues are the domain of the local health department and TCEQ,” says agency spokesman Chris Van Deusen.

After the boil-water notice went out, Webb County officials nonetheless repeatedly told residents of Rio Bravo and El Cenizo that their water was safe to drink, according to state records. Perez-Garcia asked that the boil notice be lifted just a few days after it was issued. State officials refused.



The patrons at the Epoca de Oro adult day care center in Rio Bravo drink bottled water and use the caps as lotería markers during their daily games. Photo by Jennifer Whitney.

"The TCEQ was protecting themselves," says Perez-Garcia, adding that he believes some of the agency's sampling was incorrect, and that the water was safe to drink long before the boil-water notice was lifted three weeks later.

After the notice was lifted, Hull continued to find problems at the plant, including turbidity levels that were far too high, records show. In September 2013, the TCEQ **slapped** Webb County with a \$60,000 fine for dozens of violations, and demanded that the county fix its automatic computer system and make several other major improvements within 60 days.

But the county hasn't made much progress, causing mounting frustration at the agency and within the community.

TAKING MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS

In the 1990s, local citizens formed alliances to demand basic services. But by the time the water plant opened, those groups had dissolved, and few knew where to go for help in a community where most speak Spanish.

"There's a lot of oppression here, everywhere you turn," says Karla Tamez, who grew up in El Cenizo and still lives there with her mother and disabled brother. "Especially for people that don't have documents."

In the spring of 2013, Tamez was finishing up a nursing degree and fighting for better trash collection and sewer service in El Cenizo. A course in microbiology made her wonder what was in the water she was drinking.

“It’s drinking water. At some point, this is essential. This is a basic right.”

— Amy Johnson, attorney at RioGrande Legal Aid

Tamez gathered more than 200 signatures to form an activist committee of El Cenizo residents asking for better trash collection, water and sewer services. It was called the Comité de Ciudadanos Unidos de El Cenizo, or the Committee of United Citizens of El Cenizo.

Through internet searches, she learned how to complain to state regulators. Tamez says TCEQ investigators came to her home to test water and look at broken sewer pipes and overflows nearby. But nothing seemed to change.

Soon after the infamous 2013 boil water notice, Tamez’s committee joined with a similar group in Rio Bravo to take matters into their own hands. A few months later, with the help of RioGrande Legal Aid, a law firm that represents low-income border residents, they [sued](#) Webb County, alleging it had violated the federal Safe Drinking Water Act.

“The TCEQ hasn’t been as aggressive as you would want them to be,” says attorney Amy Johnson. The agency’s authority and resources might be limited, she says, “but it’s drinking water. At some point, this is essential. This is a basic right.”



Dozens of El Cenizo residents signed up to be part of the Comité de Ciudadanos Unidos de El Cenizo, or Committee of United Citizens of El Cenizo, to demand better water and sewer service and trash collection. Photo by Jennifer Whitney.

The lawsuit ended in a settlement requiring the county to **post** drinking water quality reports online — which it finally started to do in January, several months late. And in community meetings also required by the settlement, RioGrande Legal Aid's lawyers say they are not encouraged by progress reports on repairs at the plant.

TRY, TRY AGAIN

Nearly a year and a half after the August 2013 boil-water notice, the plant's computer system has just begun working. The facility **continues** to produce drinking water with turbidity levels exceeding state health standards, though not high enough to trigger another boil-water notice.

Three of the workers indicted for allegedly falsifying water quality records still work at the plant. Perez-Garcia calls them "basically low-level employees who were acting according to the orders of their administrators." The administrators no longer work for the county.

In an interview, TCEQ officials said their options are limited. By statute, all they can do is cite public water systems — of which there are nearly 7,000 in Texas — for violations, issue fines and attempt to resolve them.

Why is money not enough?



“You’ve got to look at what authority the Legislature’s given to everybody. They’re ultimately the ones responsible if they want to step in and do something,” says Steve Niemeyer, head of border affairs for the agency. “We just do what we’re told, given the authority we have.”

Even with a faulty water plant, the people of Rio Bravo are better off than other border communities, officials point out. Some public water systems are so small and remote that there’s no address to mail a notice of violation to, and nobody to answer the phone.

“We were in communication, and we still continue to be in communication with the county. They’re still talking to us, they’re working with us, to try to achieve compliance,” says David Ramirez, director of the border and Permian Basin regional offices for the TCEQ. “We can’t ask for more than that.”

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Democratic state Sen. [Judith Zaffirini](#), whose Laredo-based district includes the two communities,

says the TCEQ filled its oversight role by responding to citizen complaints, investigating the plant and imposing "substantial penalties" for violations.

She acknowledges that multiple fines haven't resolved issues at the plant, but stops short of claiming lawmakers should give the TCEQ more power.

"When you see that penalties are no longer deterrents, it's important to look into the situation and find out why not," Zaffirini says, adding: "This was not a problem that simply blossomed and the government stepped in. It was unscrupulous developers who caused this problem, and somehow the focus has been lost as if it were always a government issue. It wasn't."

Progress is slow on major repairs at the plant, which Perez-Garcia blamed on the death of a contractor. He added that finding qualified workers is a challenge because the oilfields are luring them away. The plant has been unable to fill seven open jobs, he says.



El Cenizo and its neighboring border town of Rio Bravo in South Texas have a brand-new water treatment plant that was supposed to provide nearly 10,000 people here with clean drinking water. But it's never been run properly, critics say. Photo by Jennifer Whitney.

Last fall, residents of Rio Bravo and El Cenizo got more bad news — they will soon be paying far more for water service. County officials say they've long been subsidizing the plant, at a cost mostly to residents in neighboring Laredo, and can no longer afford to do so. That means the average household water bill could double, from \$350 annually today to \$700. On top of that,

Webb County is asking for millions of dollars in loans from the state to make repairs to the treatment plant, which will raise average water bills by several hundred more dollars over time.

RioGrande Legal Aid's lawyers say that after decades of trying to help the communities, what they've seen happen in Rio Bravo and El Cenizo is unique. Failed public works projects aren't uncommon, but faked water quality reports are rare.

What's happened "has a lot to do with the disenfranchisement and the marginalization of those communities," says RioGrande Legal Aid attorney Israel Reyna. Webb County's government is focused on the urban center of Laredo, he says, and few pay attention to the dozens of colonias and former colonias in the county.

New local leaders say they are hoping to win back community trust. Webb County Judge Cayetano "Tano" Tijerina, sworn in in January, says it's time to move on from the politics that "absolutely" played a role in the "sad situation" the people of Rio Bravo and El Cenizo were left to deal with.

"I think it was very much mishandled. It was something that could've definitely been avoided, and that's the hardest part," Tijerina says. "But we're not here to point any fingers. Now it's how we're going to mend the fences."

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Why Fort Smith, Arkansas Is Planning Oklahoma's Next Lake

MARCH 12, 2015 | 8:00 AM

BY LOGAN LAYDEN



LOGAN LAYDEN / STATEIMPACT OKLAHOMA

The current Lee Creek Reservoir near Van Buren, Ark.

In Oklahoma, the natural beauty of Lee Creek — one of the state's scenic rivers — is protected by state law. In Arkansas, Lee Creek is an important water source for fast-growing Fort Smith. Now, **Fort Smith has a plan** to turn Lee Creek into Oklahoma's next lake, and reignite a dispute that was settled more than 20 years ago.

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Why Fort Smith, Arkansas Is Planning Oklahoma...
4:06

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A DECADES-OLD FIGHT

If Fort Smith had its way in late 80s and early 90s, there'd already be a large reservoir on the Arkansas-Oklahoma border. The city's plan back then was for a **lake much larger** than the current Lee Creek Reservoir that would spill into hundreds of acres of Sequoyah County — In Oklahoma.

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Jay Hannah is part of the reason why Fort Smith didn't get it.

"They had a rather ambitious plan," Hannah tells StateImpact. "My recollection from the early 90s and reading through the materials is that they had a plan to increase the height of the impoundment, and therefore be able to adjust the flowage so that they could increase the volume of the lake. Ed and I denied that request."

He's talking about Ed Fite, who, along with Hannah, made up a two-man Lee Creek Commission appointed by Governor David Walters. Their orders: Take a hard line against Fort Smith's designs on Lee Creek.

"What he probably told Jay — if I heard Jay right — is just vote no," Fite says.

At the time, Oklahoma wasn't in the mood to negotiate over Lee Creek. The whole reason for the commission was **Arkansas had just dammed the river** after years of resistance from environmental groups and the State of Oklahoma that culminated in a federal lawsuit and an 11th hour agreement.

"That case was docketed in Denver, Colorado," Hannah says. "And the attorney general of Oklahoma and the attorney general of Arkansas were on their way into the courtroom when they met in the hallway and said, you know, we've been neighbors here for a long time, maybe we should have an amicable discussion about Lee Creek."

They decided Fort Smith could have the dam that created the current reservoir, but any future expansion would require Oklahoma's approval. Fite, who now serves as executive director of the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission, has **that section of state law** bookmarked:

"The stream or river shall not be impounded by any large dam or structure, except as specifically authorized by the legislature," Fite reads from a book of Oklahoma statutes.

The law carves out another exception for communities wanting to use a scenic river as a water supply, but only if the project doesn't "significantly interfere with the preservation of the stream as a scenic, free-flowing stream."

Fite says Lee Creek changes as it approaches the current reservoir.

"As I get closer to Webber Creek, the characteristics of the Lee Creek as a free-flowing stream have been all but negated because of the impoundment downstream," Fite says. "It looks like a river, but it's really just water that's being held back."

ROUND 2 BEGINS

He says enlarging the reservoir would damage the natural flow of Lee Creek. For more than 20 years Fort Smith hasn't tried, until now. Fort Smith's public utilities director, Steve Parke, confirms the city is in the process of buying land to expand the lake. And the land it's buying is in Oklahoma.

"Recently we had three property owners who desired to sell their property to Fort Smith for that future purpose, and we picked up another 70-plus acres," Parke says. "And we still have about another 600-acres, going from memory, that would have to be acquired."

So Oklahoma's next lake could belong to Arkansas. The process will take decades, and



LOGAN LAYDEN / STATEIMPACT OKLAHOMA
Fort Smith Public Utilities Director Steve Parke.

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there are a myriad of obstacles that could get in the way of Fort Smith's plans. Ed Fite is one of those obstacles.

"When I float the Lee Creek in a canoe or a kayak, the water has kind of a blue glacier cast to it. It's not as crystal clear as the Illinois will be this time of year. It has kind of a fog to it," Fite says.

And there's another player here who could have a big say in whether Lee Creek gets turned into a much larger lake.

"The other gorilla in the closet is going to be the Cherokee Nation," Fite says. "The Cherokee Nation is not the Cherokee Nation of the 80s now."

He describes the cobblestone river bottom that narrows and widens as Lee Creek meanders along the Arkansas-Oklahoma line, a reminder of how arbitrary the border is when it comes to water.

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SF climate task force urges opposing PNM rate hike

From the newspaper

Journal North

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By T. S. Last / Journal Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: Thursday, March 12, 2015 at 12:06 am

SANTA FE – The Climate Action Task Force formed by Mayor Javier Gonzales last year to identify what the city can do to prepare for climate change is recommending that the city work to oppose the Public Service Company of New Mexico's proposed rate increase.

In December, PNM submitted a plan to the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission for an overall 12 percent rate hike – 14 percent for residential customers – to generate more than \$100 million in revenue annually. The money would be used to cover new investments in power plants and other infrastructure, make up for a drop in power consumption caused by energy conservation and add to its renewable energy portfolio.

At Wednesday's City Council meeting, former mayor David Coss, who is co-chairing the climate task force, presented a list of energy initiatives the task force is recommending the city adopt.

Because PNM's plan to move toward utilizing renewable energy isn't as ambitious as the city's, Coss said its plan would be a "backward step" in terms of Santa Fe reaching its own energy efficiency goals, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and becoming carbon neutral by 2040.

The suggestion to oppose the PNM rate increase actually fell under the task force's larger recommendation to strengthen and expand energy efficiency programs and solar energy projects in the community. Councilors also have been discussing the idea of creating a city-owned electricity utility.

The task force also would set a goal of 10,000 residential solar energy systems in Santa Fe. The other broad task force recommendations were:

- Establish goals and benchmarks to reduce energy consumption to city-owned buildings and facilities.
- Pursue energy performance contracting.
- Scale up solar distributed generation projects on city facilities.
- Educate and inform the public about available programs and the cost-effectiveness of solar and energy efficiency measures.
- Utilize creative financing options.

Within each recommendation, the task force identified actionable items that could be undertaken within the next six months and implemented by the end of the year. Coss said the recommendations of the task force, made up of about 70 community members, were at the point now where they could come before Council committees in the form of resolutions. Mayor Gonzales said that city staff would take no action on any recommendation until the City Council adopted a resolution to give direction.

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Proposed OG&E hike draws critics of utility's plan, EPA mandate

By PAUL MONIES The Oklahoman | Posted: Thursday, March 12, 2015 12:00 am

Representatives of low-income Oklahomans and a large industrial customer were among critics Tuesday of an Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co. plan to recover \$1.1 billion from customers for environmental compliance and replacement generation.

Meanwhile, several residents and city officials from fast-growing eastern Canadian County supported the utility's plan, saying the company has been a valuable community partner whose Mustang plant has generated millions in property taxes for local schools.

The comments came during a break in the sixth day of testimony in OG&E's case before the Oklahoma Corporation Commission. A public comment period is each day at 1:30 p.m. at the commission in Oklahoma City.

If approved, OG&E's plan could increase the average residential customer's bill 15 percent by 2019. Industrial customers could see their bills rise by 20 percent during the same period. The increases would be phased in each year as a separate surcharge, or rider, on customer bills.

[Click here to link to the article on NewsOK. Some stories require an Oklahoman subscription to read.](#)

pmonies@opubco.com

NEWS



Fire destroys abandoned building in downtown Austin



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Asher Price

Central Texas Air Coalition approves EPA letter, but not before criticism from Austin Council Member

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for

ed Austin City Council member

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f t



The Austin area has narrowly remained within federal air quality standards, partly by requiring drivers in Travis and Williamson counties to undergo annual emissions inspections.

Should Austin violate the smog standard, annual vehicle emissions testing could spread to Hays and Bastrop counties.

Those were the stakes as the Central Texas Clean Air Coalition, a committee of elected officials from five counties around Austin, approved a letter urging the EPA to take the region's efforts into account as it contemplates more stringent smog standards.

But Austin City Council member Don Zimmerman, newly appointed to the coalition by Mayor Steve Adler, told fellow coalition members they were not sufficiently accounting for the costs involved with meeting air pollution regulations and raised an alternative letter he had circulated critical of the EPA's scientific conclusions.

The draft letter accused the EPA of overstating the strength and consistency of epidemiology research. It also says the EPA selectively picks out facts and argues that "the science does not support" more stringent standards.

During the meeting, Zimmerman called upon testimony from Julie Goodman, an air toxicologist with a Boston-based company, Gradient. The company is being paid \$1.65 million by the Texas environmental agency to review EPA's data as the state prepares to do further legal battle against federal regulations.

"There's no evidence that lowering the standard is going to have any impact on mortality," Goodman told the coalition.

(Zimmerman told the Statesman that he had met with Michael Honeycutt, the chief toxicologist for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, as he prepared his letter. Honeycutt has been at the forefront of a move to try to discredit conventional wisdom on the smog standards — and his findings have been spurned by other scientists.)

Even as Zimmerman was pressing the coalition to criticize the underlying science behind the air quality rules, Neil Carman and Al Armendariz of the Sierra Club argued the coalition should do more to push the EPA to action the rules.

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The coalition letter, Carman said, "complete standard."

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In the end, the coalition approved the draft federal air quality standards was stripped of

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and economic benefits of the (smog)

— but not before some language supporting Williamson County contingent.

(That language was "overly deferential to the Williamson County Conservation Foundation

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"Collectively it will not have the spice or sweetness any member would like," said Sarah Eckhardt, the Travis County judge who chairs the coalition. "I would like the letter to be sweeter; Mr. Zimmerman would like it to be spicier. It's going to be bland because it's a consensus letter."

Zimmerman abstained.

The Clean Air Coalition has traditionally sought to work in concert with federal officials to keep Central Texas within federal air quality standards. To tamp down smog, the Austin area spends roughly \$30 million on vehicle inspections and repairs per year. About half the money comes through the \$16.25 annual vehicle emissions inspection that residents of Travis and Williamson counties undertake annually.

The current smog standard of 75 parts per billion was set in 2008. The new standard could be as low as 65 parts per billion.

The Austin-area efforts have helped drop the levels from 77 parts per billion in 2008 to 69 parts per billion this year. But while smog levels have improved, tallying local benefits is elusive: The Texas Department of State Health Services has not conducted any analysis of health benefits that might have been derived from stricter air quality regulations, according to a spokeswoman.

That puts Austin on an arc of compliance — unless EPA takes only 2014 to 2016 data into account and opts for the lower part of the ozone range.

Texas businesses say meeting such requirements will mean costly retrofits to their factories and refineries — costs, they say, that will eventually be passed on to consumers. Public health experts and environmentalists say the standards will help keep people healthy, especially those with respiratory problems such as asthma.

Kathi Harris, air emissions manager at Holt Cat, told the coalition that her company supported the coalition letter as the best way to "remain in attainment if at all possible."

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Local News

5:44 PM WED MARCH 11, 2015

Los Alamos May Face Stricter Runoff Regulations

By [RITA DANIELS](#) (@PEOPLE/RITA-DANIELS)

Many of the urban discharges addressed in the petition to the EPA impact this stretch of the Rio Grande near the White Rock lookout just southwest of Los Alamos.

Credit: Amigos Bravos



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Should Los Alamos National Labs and Los Alamos County be held to the Clean Water Act standards for stormwater runoff that ends up in the Rio Grande? That's the question [the Environmental Protection Agency is weighing](#)

http://amigosbravos.org/uploads/fck//file/Preliminary%20Designation%20Los%20Alamos_full%20document.pdf

. A public comment period on the matter will begin soon.

Amigos Bravos, a New Mexico organization that works on river water issues, [filed a petition](#) (<http://amigosbravos.org/uploads/fck//file/Amigos%20Bravos%20Petition%20063014-Final.pdf>) with the federal regulator last summer. Rachel Conn, who runs the nonprofit, said they discovered high levels of heavy metals and radioactive contaminants were *not* coming from toxic industrial sites at LANL, but rather from water cascading off of buildings and pavement after storms.

"When it rains, the water picks up all those little particles of contamination," Conn explained, "and the rainwater goes into our canyons, into the tributaries and eventually into the Rio Grande."

The EPA could decide in the coming months that LANL and urban pockets within the county will have to start operating under a [special permit](http://water.epa.gov/polwaste/npdes/stormwater/Municipal-Separate-Storm-Sewer-System-MS4-Main-Page.cfm) (<http://water.epa.gov/polwaste/npdes/stormwater/Municipal-Separate-Storm-Sewer-System-MS4-Main-Page.cfm>) that requires cleanup of the stormwater runoff.

Both the lab and the county have taken issue with the environmentalists' petition.

TAGS: [LANL \(/term/lanl\)](#) [EPA \(/term/epa\)](#) [Amigos Bravos \(/term/amigos-bravos\)](#) [Clean Water Act \(/term/clean-water-act\)](#) [Los Alamos County \(/term/los-alamos-county\)](#) [MS4 \(/term/ms4\)](#)

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Salvage plans underway for damaged tanker in Houston Ship Channel

Author: [Matt Aufdenspring](#), Web Managing Editor, Click2Houston.com

[Samantha Ptashkin](#), Reporter, sptashkin@click2houston.com

[Phil Archer](#), Reporter, parcher@kprc.com

Published On: Mar 11 2015 03:05:08 PM CDT Updated On: Mar 11 2015 07:06:03 PM CDT



LA PORTE, Texas -

Plans to salvage the damaged chemical tanker Carla Maersk got underway Wednesday, two days after a collision with another ship in the Houston Ship Channel.

The Carla Maersk's port cargo tanks were [damaged in the collision with the bulk freighter Conti Peridot and leaked MTBE](#), which is a fuel additive in gasoline. The Carla Maersk was reportedly carrying 216,000 barrels of MTBE taken on at Texas Petro Chemical Plant, but the Coast Guard is unsure at this time how much chemical leaked.

[DRAW VIDEO OF AFTERMATH](#)

The Ship Channel remains closed to all traffic from Light 86 to the Fred Hartman Bridge. There are 26 ships waiting to come into Houston and 14 waiting to leave.

Congresswoman Sheila Lee Jackson and Congressman Brian Babin both joined members of the Coast Guard Wednesday to take an aerial tour of the damage and to learn more about the cleanup efforts now underway. "I saw the Carla Maersk," Jackson Lee said. "It is in a salvage state, it cannot move on its own and the crew remains on board."

A Coast Guard helicopter detected a narrow, 2-mile long sheen of MTBE coming from the ship Tuesday morning. Response teams will use high-density foam to suppress any flammable vapor seeping from the punctured tanks inside the anchored ship.

If there are no dangerous vapors, responders will begin the removal of the liquid cargo. Then the ship will be moved from the Houston Ship Channel to a safe berthing area.

Responders said there are no public health or environmental concerns at this time after more than 500 air and water tests have been conducted.

MTBE, used to prevent a knocking noise in the engine, is flammable and smells like paint thinner, according to the EPA's website. It can cause dizziness, nausea and trouble breathing if inhaled.

On Tuesday afternoon, Conti Peridot, loaded with steel, was safely moved with help from two tugboats to City Dock 21.

The cause of the collision remains under investigation. Crews from the National Transportation Safety Board are on the scene and will investigate for the next five to seven days. Wednesday they had a chance to climb aboard the Conti Peridot to examine the ship and listen to radio calls which indicate "the pilots restricted vessel movement due to fog that was prior to the accident and at the time vessel movements were restricted the vessels were already in the channel," Earl Weener of the NTSB told members of the media during a press conference Wednesday afternoon.

Weener says crew members from both ships were in contact with one another prior to the collision.

He also told members of the media the ships were traveling at about eight knots at the time of the collision, which is a typical speed for that location.

The investigators will also be looking at steering, propulsion, weather conditions and maintenance records.

The investigation will take about one year to complete.

An incident command post has been established at the City of La Porte Emergency Operations Center to further response efforts. A citizen hotline has been set up. You can call 281-470-0000.

[Click here to for frequently asked questions about seafood safety in the area.](#)

This is the second collision the Houston Ship Channel in the last five days. [On Thursday, a container ship and a chemical tanker collided.](#) There was no pollution released into the water and there were no injuries in that incident.

PHOTOS: 2 ships collide in Houston Ship Channel

Published On: Mar 10 2015 02:41:00 PM CDT Updated On: Mar 10 2015 02:50:16 PM CDT

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Images of the response, aftermath and investigation of the Houston Ship Channel collision involving two ships.



1 / 15

March 10: Sky 2 flew over the damaged Carla Maersk in the Houston Ship Channel.



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DSHS on ship collision: Don't eat seafood with a chemical odor

Author: [Sara Fatima Dhanji](#), Content Editor, Click2Houston.com

Published On: Mar 11 2015 03:49:18 PM CDT Updated On: Mar 11 2015 03:50:11 PM CDT



HOUSTON -

The Texas Department of State Health Services said it will issue advisories as needed after [two vessels collided in the Houston Ship Channel on Monday, releasing the chemical MTBE into the water](#)

MTBE is a fuel additive in gasoline. The Carla Maersk was reportedly carrying 216,000 barrels of MTBE taken on at Texas Petro Chemical Plant, but the Coast Guard is unsure how much chemical leaked.

In the meantime, the DSHS recommends that fisherman exercise common sense by avoiding fish or shellfish that has a chemical odor similar to turpentine.

The DSHS also said it has not closed any areas to the harvesting of fish, crabs, or shrimp. MTBE does not build up in fish tissue, so there is not expected to be a long-term effect on seafood in the Houston area. In addition, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said studies have shown the MTBE evaporates relatively quickly from surface water.

There is also no indication that seafood in stores and restaurants was affected by the MTBE release.

MTBE is used to prevent a knocking noise in the engine, is flammable and smells like paint thinner, according to the EPA's website. It can cause dizziness, nausea and trouble breathing if inhaled.

Questions about seafood safety can be directed to DSHS at 512-776-7400 or the Seafood and Aquatic Life Group at 512-834-6757.



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Everything New Orleans

\$15.9 million in starter switches: Big parts create big cost for pump stations

Mark Schlieffstein, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune By **Mark Schlieffstein, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune**

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on March 11, 2015 at 7:38 PM, updated March 11, 2015 at 8:15 PM

The **permanent closure and pump station structures** being built at the mouths of the **17th Street, Orleans Avenue and London Avenue** canals will cost an additional \$15.9 million because of a change in the complicated electrical switches used to start the pumps, the **Army Corps of Engineers** announced this week.

That brings the cost of the three stations being built by **PCCP Constructors Joint Venture** to \$630.7 million.

The original contract with PCCP called for the company to use "automatic transformer starters," said Ricky Boyett, a corps spokesman. But the **Sewerage & Water Board**, which will operate the pump stations when they are completed, objected to that type of starter because it requires a cool down period after a certain number of consecutive starts, he said.

Instead, the contractor will use "variable frequency drive" starter switches that allow greater control of the motors used to operate the pumps. The switches actually are complex electrical devices that fit into cabinets that can be 9 feet high by 18 feet wide.

"S&WB made the argument that they need better flexibility in operating the pumps, so the corps modified the contract to change the starters to the 5000 horsepower variable frequency starters" mentioned in a Department of Defense contract award announcement on Monday.

The three stations require a total of 10 of the variable starters, with each one costing \$1.6 million more than the automatic starters, Boyett said.

Boyett said the corps has worked for about a year on the pump switch issue with PCCP, the S&WB and the state Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, which is the official local sponsor for the New Orleans area hurricane levee system to minimize impacts on the stations' construction schedule.

But Boyett said that because the switches are just now being ordered, officials don't know if the change will delay the estimated Jan. 7, 2017, construction completion date.

The three structures are being designed to block storm surges of 16 feet above sea level in Lake

Pontchartrain during hurricanes from entering the canals, while pumping rainwater entering the canals from the city's drainage system into the lake. That's the estimated height of surges caused by a hurricane with a 1 percent chance of occurring in any year, the so-called 100-year storm.

The contract requires that when the surge closures are operated during storms, the pumps move 12,500 cubic feet per second of water from the 17th Street Canal into Lake Pontchartrain; 2,700 cubic feet per second from the Orleans Avenue Canal, and 9,000 cubic feet per second from the London Avenue Canal.

PCCP, a joint venture that includes Kiewit Louisiana Co., Traylor Bros. Inc., and the M.R. Pittman Group LLC, won the initial design-build contract for the stations in April 2013.

The company had originally been awarded the contract for \$629.5 million in September 2012, but that award was protested by losing bidders Bechtel Infrastructure Corp. and CBY Design Builders in challenges filed with the Congressional Government Accountability Office in October and November of 2012.

PCCP's September 2012 contract award also followed a challenge in 2011 by PCCP and Bechtel of an April 2011 decision by the corps to award the contract to CBY for \$675 million..

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National Resources Defense Council press secretary: McConnell, Inhofe, GOP aim to undermine clean power without an alternative solution to climate change

By JAKE THOMPSON | Posted: Thursday, March 12, 2015 12:00 am

As Marvin Gaye sang, “What’s Going On?”

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman James Inhofe (R-OK) held up a misleading chart Wednesday to assert that a number of states oppose the Environmental Protection Agency’s Clean Power Plan. And Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has attracted attention for penning an op-ed calling for states to essentially sit on their hands and refuse to develop state-based plans to meet the EPA’s first-ever limits on carbon pollution from power plants. Sen. John Barrasso, (R-WY), has echoed McConnell’s “Just Say No” idea drive in a memo, according to E&E News.

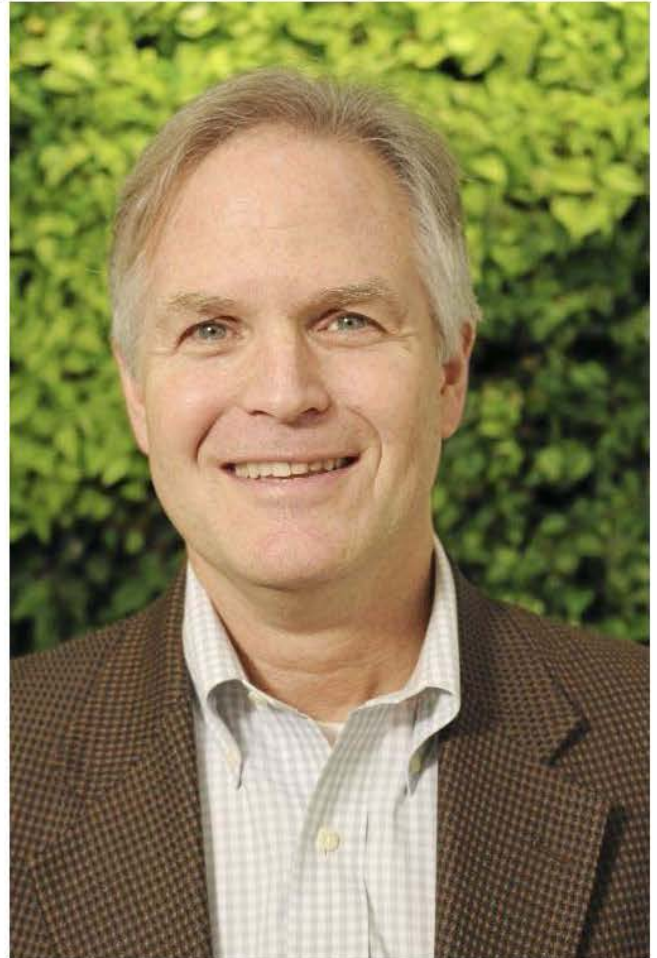
What’s going on? Congressional Republican leaders are attempting to undermine the Clean Power Plan and the administration’s responsibility to address the most serious environmental threat of our time — climate change — and without any alternative plan.

It’s striking because backers of this effort are distorting the facts, state legislatures are rejecting bills that oppose the EPA’s carbon pollution standards, and the majority of the American people — seen in poll after poll — want the government to take action against climate change, including several that overwhelmingly want a state-based plan to meet the federal standards.

Let’s take a closer look:

Senator Inhofe’s fuzzy math.

- At the start of a hearing on the Clean Power Plan, Inhofe held up a chart asserting that 32 states



Jake_Thompson_headshot_clos

Jake Thompson

oppose this climate initiative. But there's less than meets the eye — a lot less.

- As NRDC Climate and Clean Air Director David Doniger writes in a new blog: "Inhofe's chart radically overstates state opposition. It includes any state where some state official or some state body has said something raising concerns — even where that state is actively engaged in examining how it can make the Clean Power Plan's proposed carbon pollution reductions." Read more [here](#).
- Inhofe doesn't mention the states — at least 14 — that are calling for strengthening the Clean Power Plan, seen [here](#)

For more than 40 years, states have implemented clean air act measures.

- During the 45 year history of the Clean Air Act, state agencies have routinely designed and implemented pollution reduction plans to meet federal clean air standards, with input from key stakeholders.
- In an attempt to stymie this process, the polluter-backed American Legislative Exchange Council's environmental task force approved model bill language last December to create new roadblocks and red tape to obstruct adoption of state plans. ALEC's model bill would require a state agency to obtain a legislative vote of approval before the state's pollution plan could be submitted to EPA.
- Legislative approval — not required for state plans over the last 45 years — presents an opportunity for political manipulation or outright obstruction at the behest of the coal industry.

But state legislative efforts to stop the Clean Power Plan are fizzling.

- ALEC certainly has been busy, but not very successful. This year, state legislative bills attacking the Clean Power Plan have died in Colorado, Iowa, Mississippi, Montana, South Dakota and Virginia. Read more in my colleague [Aliya Haq's blog](#).

Polls show most Americans support climate action across many states.

- Americans strongly support the EPA's plan to address climate change, seen in **polling** by Harstad Strategic Research, Inc. for nine key states: Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, New Hampshire, North Carolina and Virginia.

--More than two-thirds support the EPA's plan to limit climate change pollution from power plants. That includes 87 percent of Democrats and 53 percent of Republicans, the polling shows.

--A full 70 percent of Latinos and African Americans favor the EPA's plan to address climate change. Nearly two-thirds of Americans in these states want their U.S. senators to support efforts to address the impacts of climate change on local communities. A full 86 percent of Democrats, 62 percent of Independents, and 43 percent of Republicans agreed.

- In **separate bipartisan polling** Americans in Colorado, Maine, New Hampshire, Florida and

Virginia, overwhelmingly back EPA climate action.

--There's very substantial support across the board for the EPA's climate action proposals to limit on carbon pollution from power plants: Colorado, 66 percent; Florida, 74 percent; Maine 74 percent; New Hampshire, 72 percent; and Virginia 69 percent.

--Even a majority of Republicans support the carbon standards: in Florida, 53 percent; Maine, 53 percent; New Hampshire, 54 percent; and Virginia 54 percent.

On Wednesday, EPA's administrator said states are working with EPA, and carbon standards will happen.

- EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy spoke on Wednesday, March 11, at the Council on Foreign Relations. Here is the administrator's response during Q&A when asked about Sen. McConnell's "Just Say No" idea:

"I see no effort for states to be pulling away from the engagement and it is incredibly robust. And I am happy to leave it to states, including the state of Kentucky, to speak to the folks on the Hill who think that the best thing is for states to put their heads in the sand, and pretend like EPA isn't going to regulate. EPA IS going to regulate. Mid-summer is when the Clean Power Plan is going to be finalized.

"We have every reason to believe that states engagement that we're engaged in now is going to be productive, that we are going to have states continuing to work with us. And EPA has every ability, and we'll use it, to implement a federal plan for states that don't choose to use their own flexibility to develop their own.

"But in any case, the standards are going to be real, they are going to be aggressive, but they are going to be achievable. They are not going to threaten reliability, they are not going to significantly increase costs for the very reason we are talking about today. Because smart climate action moves the economy forward, smart climate action grows jobs, smart climate action relies on a great mix of all types of energy. All types will still be there in 2030. And we'll be able to rely on a transition to a to a low carbon energy system that is going to be continuing to move that trajectory, that downward trajectory forward. If folks are thinking any of this isn't going to happen, and this isn't going to hold up, and this isn't going to be implemented, they need to look at the history of the Clean Air Act a little bit more carefully. That's not how we do business"

States: The carbon pollution limits are achievable, and we can do it.

- In a Capitol Hill briefing on March 10, state officials from across the country gave strong endorsements for the Clean Power Plan, saying its targets are achievable while maintaining the reliability of the electric grid and that it's a necessary step to combat the climate impacts that are already affecting their residents' health and livelihood.

• “We certainly support the effort. We don't want EPA to weaken it,” said David Thornton, assistant commissioner of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. “We find our targets to be achievable,” Thornton said. Read more from NRDC’s Climate Campaign Director Pete Altman **here**.

Jake Thompson is senior press secretary of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

THE LEADER IN ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY NEWS

20. EMISSIONS:**EPA chief calls for 'binding' global agreement***Jean Chemnick, E&E reporter**Published: Wednesday, March 11, 2015*

The international community must reach a legally binding agreement on climate change this year, U.S. EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy said today.

This year's high-stakes round of U.N. negotiations will not produce a "silver bullet" to solve the global problem, the EPA chief said. But the accord expected to be signed in Paris this December must be a meaningful step toward combating a crisis with national security and humanitarian implications, she said.

"We are hoping for a Paris agreement that is binding, that provides us an opportunity to account for greenhouse gases in each nation, that is able to address and commit to specific reductions in a timely way, and that we will be able to understand as a big step forward," she said at an event hosted by the Council on Foreign Relations.

In a scrum following the event, McCarthy stated that this was not a change in position. The legal form of the agreement is under discussion internationally, and the United States has made clear that it is interested in the hybrid approach put forward by New Zealand, in which elements of accountability would be legally binding but country commitments would not be.

The United States must play a leading role in bringing about the agreement, McCarthy said.

Last year's U.S.-China joint agreement helped pave the way for it, and the United States will continue to engage with India and other major emitters in the run-up to this year's conference, she added.

"In this century – when it comes to climate action – we truly are the indispensable nation," she said of the United States.

McCarthy's agency is in the process of promulgating a rule that is the centerpiece of President Obama's second-term climate agenda. The Clean Power Plan, which is set to be finalized this summer, is crucial to the United States' meeting not only its post-2020 commitments but its promise to reduce emissions by 17 percent below 2005 levels by the end of this decade.

But McCarthy cited the controversial draft for carbon dioxide emissions from existing power plants as the next step in a "clean energy revolution" that will deliver positive economic results.

"The global climate fight is a marathon relay race – there's a lot of ground to cover, and we need everyone to run – EPA's action gets the U.S. sprinting out of the gate," she said.

McCarthy was asked how international emissions would be monitored and verified to ensure compliance with an international deal. She said EPA is growing its expertise in measuring carbon output, but acknowledged that verification practices will be subject to negotiation.

She said the United States has a strong record of "soft diplomacy" on environmental issues, which will help it reach out to other countries on climate change. "EPA's air monitor diplomacy" helped stoke Chinese public support for improvements in air quality, she said, referring to EPA's use of monitoring equipment at its Beijing embassy to track pollution.

McCarthy's speech comes one day before Secretary of State John Kerry is set to speak on the U.N. negotiations process tomorrow at the Atlantic Council. The United States is expected to unveil more details by the end of the month about how it plans to reach its commitment to slash emissions by 26 to 28 percent by 2030.

Advertisement



Everything New Orleans

At long last, New Orleans has a map of its construction projects. But could it be more?

roadwork map.jpg

A screenshot of the New Orleans roadmap of past, present and future infrastructure projects (*City of New Orleans*)

Richard Rainey, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune By **Richard Rainey, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune**

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on March 11, 2015 at 1:30 PM

While New Orleans' moving labyrinth of street closures, blinking arrows, orange barrels and chain-link fences continues to consternate denizens and drivers alike, the city now has an online roadmap to all those obstacles.

It's new. It's incomplete. But it's a start.

The question now becomes what else do you want to see included on this map?

So far, it has:

Recovery Roads - the Department of Public Works' program to restore city streets damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The city has secured an estimated \$440 million from FEMA to pay for it.

Emergency Sewer System Assessment - the Sewerage & Water Board's program to replace sewer lines wrecked by that 2005 storm. FEMA has coughed up about \$48 million for that venture.

Sewer System Evaluation and Rehabilitation Program - the long name the Environmental Protection Agency's federal mandate that the S&WB fix New Orleans' leaky sewer system. That \$374 million program began in 1998 and is scheduled to finish up in 2025.

The Southeast Louisiana Urban Flood Control Project - more well known as SELA, this is the Army Corps of Engineers' 20-years-in-the-making answer to the May 1995 flood that swamped New Orleans. For the daily driver, this is the main culprit for the shifting maze of side streets you need to know to avoid construction along Jefferson, Napoleon and Louisiana avenues Uptown, South Claiborne Avenue near the parish line and soon blocks along Florida Avenue in Upper 9th Ward.

Capital Projects - these are infrastructure projects to be paid for from local bond money, community development block grants and private resources. The Department of Public Works estimates it has about

\$500 million to work with.

The Regional Transit Authority - these projects to extend the streetcar system are quite a bit less dynamic than some of the other work, being that laying track is slow going and can't really deviate from its planned location. Nonetheless, the construction for the St.Claude - North Rampart line is on the map.

What's not there, but the city hopes to add soon:

Entergy - details of any utility line replacement jobs.

State projects - paving work on state roads, such as the resurfacing of Tulane Avenue this year.

But what would you, the nonplussed public, like to see included as well? Now is as good a time as any to speak up. The administration plans to introduce monthly updates to the map as it works to one day have it update automatically in real time.

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City of Claremore obtains \$21 million in financing to expand water treatment plant

By RHETT MORGAN World Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, March 12, 2015 12:00 am

CLAREMORE — The city has secured financing for \$21 million in upgrades to a municipal water treatment plant.

The city council and Claremore Public Works Authority recently approved an agreement to borrow that amount from RCB Bank at a 2.59 percent interest rate over 15 years, City Manager Jim Thomas said.

The current plant has maximum capacity of 4.1 million gallons of water per day.

“This new water design will allow us to go to a maximum use of 8.1 million gallons,” Thomas wrote in an email. “Based on a 3-percent growth rate we anticipate this will allow Claremore to handle our water needs to about the year 2040.”

Jon Wolff, the city’s financial adviser, submitted packets to nine financial institutions, and two responded: RCB Bank and JP Morgan. JP Morgan submitted proposals with three call dates. RCB proposed the lowest rate.

The city will pay a total of \$4,503,945 in interest for a total payment of \$25,503,945, documents show. JP Morgan’s best proposal over 15 years had the city paying \$347,795 more in interest, records indicate.

To help offset the note, city water rates will be raised on all residential, industrial and retail users, Thomas said.

“We are looking at several rate options and will be submitting our recommendation to the city council in April for a rate increase,” he said in an email.

Garver Engineering, based in North Little Rock, Arkansas, is designing the project, which the city submitted to the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality for permitting about six weeks ago.

Claremore’s goal is to start construction on the plant upgrade June 1, a process that is expected to take about two years.

The improvements are part of a plan called Claremore 2020, which outlines the city’s strategy for growth, economic development and infrastructure needs.